

Chapter 12

Training

The Office of Public Transit (OPT) administers the Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) along with state funding programmed by the Iowa DOT each year to sponsor fellowships and to conduct/coordinate transit training sessions for the transit community. Training opportunities are available to all public transit personnel, their service contractor's transit staff, and planners. Transit managers are encouraged to provide OPT's training coordinator with suggestions for training seminar topics and specific courses that would enhance the professional skills of transit staff and to meet the needs of the transit community. OPT's objective is to coordinate with the transit community to provide the best possible training program and opportunities.

Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP)

Congress authorized the formation of the Rural Transit Assistance Program funded through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). RTAP was established to offer a coordinated program in rural areas (under 50,000 population) for training, technical assistance, and research opportunities as well as other support services to improve the delivery of transit services by small urban and rural transit operators. FTA uses RTAP funding to support both a national level RTAP program, which is directed by the American Public Works Association (APWA) through a consortium arrangement with the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), and separate state level programs in each state.

National Program – At the national level, APWA works with a steering committee to guide the development of National RTAP products and services including: video training modules, technical assistance briefs, peer-to-peer technical assistance network, and a transit hotline.

- **Training modules** have been developed on a number of subjects that cover either new requirements or areas where there was a perceived lack of existing resources. These modules include a video taped presentation, an instructor manual, and participant workbooks.
- **Technical Assistance Briefs** are a series of briefing papers designed to keep rural transit informed. These briefs include legislative and regulatory updates, as well as topics of specific interest to rural transit operators. The briefs also incorporate material that has been presented at workshops.
- The **peer-to-peer network** was established to allow local transit systems to access the knowledge base of other local transit professionals who have expertise on specific topics. Most peer assistance takes the form of technical assistance via telephone or e-mail.
- **A National RTAP Hotline**, operated by CTAA under contract with APWA, offers answers to transit related questions, provides referrals to the peer network, and helps disseminate technical assistance and training materials. To receive more information, you may call or write the **National RTAP Hotline: 1-800-527-8279; Address: 725 – 15th Street, N.W., Suite 900, Washington, D.C. 20050.**

State Program – OPT receives a portion of the state level RTAP funding based on Iowa's share of the nation's non-urbanized population. In consultation with IPTA, OPT commits Iowa's share of RTAP funding to technical assistance projects and

training. OPT offers an extensive lending library of training manuals, periodicals and educational and training tools. In addition, OPT sponsors transit specific training seminars, offers fellowship assistance for persons to attend training, assists with on-site training, coordinates a peer-to-peer program, and sponsors an annual Transit Rodeo.

Lending Library

OPT's lending library offers educational and training tools to transit systems for the development and refinement of specific tasks or skills required to effectively operate a rural transportation system. The library includes videos, books, literature and self-directed training modules that can be combined into a complete training program for transit staff and operators. Many of the public domain training materials have been duplicated, with permission, and provided to each Iowa transit system.

The Iowa DOT has produced two videos funded by RTAP: *Iowa's Coordination Pledge (1991)* and *Your Ticket to Safety: Bloodborne Pathogen Awareness for Transit Professionals (1993)*. Each of these videos has been loaned and shown throughout the country many times. The coordination video can be used as an advocacy tool to promote coordination and consolidation of all forms of urban and rural transportation services. The bloodborne pathogen video discusses hazards involved with contacting body fluids, the appropriate precautions, and clean-up techniques in a passenger transportation setting. It also addresses OSHA requirements and the concept of "universal precautions."

Transit managers should contact OPT's secretary to borrow videos, books, modules, and other training materials.

Training Seminars

OPT sponsors training sessions on transit topics several times each year. These courses range from mini-workshops to multi-day courses on such issues as management, ADA, drug and alcohol program compliance, procurement or planning. All sessions are offered to Iowa public transit systems and transit planning agencies free of charge or for a nominal registration fee. The frequency of these sessions and the subjects covered are based on input received from the transit industry and the perception of training needs by OPT staff. Professional trainers are primarily used to provide transit specific training with a curriculum developed to meet the needs of Iowa's transit industry.

Seminars sponsored by OPT may be directed to particular staff such as drivers (e.g. defensive driving, bus operator training, passenger assistance techniques, sensitivity training), or maintenance personnel (e.g. lift maintenance, small or large bus specifications), or even to a particular class of system (i.e. small urbans, large urbans, or regionals).

Some of the types of training seminars that have been offered by OPT and conducted in Iowa are:

- Accounting (financial management)
- American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) Service Requirements
- Bus Operator Training
- Commercial Drivers Licenses (CDL)
- Defensive Driving

- Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)
- FTA Funding Programs
- Federal Drug and Alcohol Testing Program Requirements
- Governmental Cost Allocation Plans and Indirect Cost Rates
- Mentoring Program (Peer-to-Peer)
- Metropolitan Transportation Planning
- Passenger Assistance Techniques (PAT)
- Rural Transit Management
- Sensitivity Management
- Service Planning and Design
- Specialized Transportation Needs
- Third Party Contracting (Procurement)

Iowa Public Transit Association (IPTA)/Iowa DOT Transit Training Conferences

Iowa DOT contracts with the IPTA to hold a minimum of three transit training conferences each year, which are open to all Iowa's transit systems, urban and rural. These conferences are funded in part by RTAP with minimal registration fees. Sessions are offered on a variety of topics to meet the interest of all systems, large and small. At least once each year, an Expo is included. The Expo offers an exhibition of vendors and equipment. It also allows conference participants the opportunity to talk with vendors and manufacturer representatives, and preview actual vehicles available for purchase.

Training Fellowships

OPT sponsors training fellowships on a variety of subjects. Federal and state funds are programmed each fiscal year for training fellowships. Fellowships are funded with the following dollars:

- Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) – For all regional and small urban transit systems, and Regional Planning Affiliations (RPA's).
- State Transit Assistance (STA) – For all large urban transit systems, and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO').

Iowa transit systems may sponsor members of their own staffs, staff from one of their subcontractors, or planning agency staff to attend training under an approved fellowship. Only two fellowships may be sponsored per transit system, and one per planning agency per training session, unless justification is provided and approval given by OPT's director.

In most cases, fellowships are funded at 80% of total allowed costs; i.e. transportation, lodging, tuition or registration. OPT may, at the office director's discretion, allow reimbursement at a higher percentage for OPT sponsored or other specific training for which participation is strongly encouraged by OPT. Exceptions may also be made to support Iowans' speaking at national sessions.

Training fellowships are awarded using the following criteria:

- The training is job related;
- The applicant identifies which training sessions they plan to attend and describes how the training will benefit them concerning transit related issues;
- It is cost effective;

- Funds are available; and
- Training is presented by qualified persons with recognized expertise in the area(s) covered.

Fellowship assistance will not be approved for course work being taken to satisfy requirements for a college degree or general course work needed to improve a person's job qualifications.

Application for Training Fellowships – To apply for a fellowship, an [Application for Public Transit Training Fellowship](#) must be completed and **submitted to OPT at least two weeks prior to the training**. The form must be signed by the transit manager, planning director, or other official signatory. The completed form and a copy of the brochure or training information should be mailed to OPT's secretary. Keep a copy of the application for your own records.

You will receive an e-mail or letter notification as to whether your request was approved. Any changes to your application will be noted in the notification. This notification will also include a fellowship approval number that you will need when requesting payment.

Applications will not be approved if submitted after attending the event, except in extenuating circumstances approved by the OPT director.

Allowable costs for training fellowships (Receipts are required)

- Registration – A registration receipt or a copy of both front and back of the canceled check is required.
- Lodging (Hotel/Motel) – An invoice/receipt is required. The invoice/receipt must show the cost of a single room per night and how many nights the recipient stayed overnight. The invoice/receipt must include any applicable hotel/motel and sales tax. No other room charges shall be allowed. Allowable room rates are limited to \$75.00 plus tax within Iowa (unless approved at higher levels) or identified conference hotel rates.
- Transportation (To and From Conference) –
 - Air: A copy of the airline receipt must show date traveled and cost for flight. A receipt is required.
 - Car: The number of eligible miles traveled should be documented and multiplied by \$.39 per mile. (Mileage reimbursement is limited to a maximum of the cost of economy airfare.) Ride-sharing is encouraged, but only one person per vehicle can claim the mileage reimbursement.
 - Rental Cars: Rental cars are treated the same as any other car, no receipt is needed. (Only miles for the most direct route to and from the training site are eligible.)
 - Bus/Cab/Shuttles/Parking/Other: Receipts are required for individual expenses in excess of \$5.00. (Local car rentals must be separately justified and approved. Reimbursement is limited to \$.39 per mile.) Travel costs other than arrival at, and departure from, the conference or training session are not allowed.

Reimbursement of Costs – A [Transit Request for Payment](#) must be submitted within 60 days after the event. Payments are made only to the applicant transit system or planning agency. No individual payments are made, nor are any direct

payments made to subcontractors. The request must be signed by the transit system's designated signatory, the transit manager, or the planning director if the request is for a planning agency. Fellowship payments must also be reflected on year-end financial reports.

The fellowship approval number must be included on the request form. Send the reimbursement request and necessary receipts to:

Office of Public Transit
Attention: OPT Secretary
Iowa Department of Transportation
800 Lincoln Way
Ames, Iowa 50010
Phone: (515)233-7870 Fax: (515)233-7983

Additional Fellowship Guidelines

Cancellation – If the recipient of a training fellowship cannot attend a course/workshop for which registration fees or a room deposit has been paid, the office must be promptly notified. OPT approval must be obtained prior to substituting anyone for the original training fellowship recipient. Expenses may not be billed under a fellowship unless someone approved by OPT actually receives training. Costs of forfeited airline reservations, registration fees, or room deposits are not eligible fellowship expenses.

Ground transportation – To minimize ground transportation expenditures, recipients are required to take public transportation, airport limousines or shuttle buses whenever available instead of taxis. Whenever possible, share taxis with others. Travel by taxi or rental cars on an exclusive basis should be the last resort.

Lodging reimbursement – The single hotel or motel room rate will be reimbursed unless a room is shared by two or more persons each attending under the training fellowships program. If a rate other than the single room rate is charged, the single room rate must be shown on the bill.

Foreign travel restriction –No fellowship shall be awarded for training outside the United States unless the cost of training is less expensive than comparable training available domestically, or if the training is so essential to the transit system that justification for waiving this restriction is accepted by the director of OPT.

On-Site Training

Fellowship assistance, normally 80 percent reimbursement of eligible costs, may be granted for on-site training within your region to employees of Iowa transit systems, their contracted service providers, and Iowa transit planning agencies. Rationale must be presented that the training is related to a variety of transit functions. The training must be shown to have a direct benefit to the transit program. Justification must show that the transit community/professionals being trained will gain substantial skills to enhance the transit system's performance.

Costs eligible for on-site training include fees and per diem for the instructor, training room, equipment rental, and other related training needs and materials.

Application Process - To obtain approval to hold on-site training in your area, submit the following application materials to OPT:

1. Completed Application for Public Transit Training Fellowship;
2. List of participants to be trained;
3. Workshop information including criteria, outline, and agenda; dates and times of workshops; instructor information;
4. Estimated breakdown of total training cost;
5. A brief justification of why the workshop is needed within your area; and
6. How the training is job related for transit employees and will enhance employees' skills.

Peer-to-Peer Program

OPT frequently provides new transit staff the names and phone numbers of other transit system staff to whom they can direct questions and recommends that they use these contacts as problems arise. This peer-to-peer network expands to include existing staff interested in learning how other transit systems operate or more about specific project related information. Transit staff may choose to visit another system to learn new or different techniques regarding transit-related issues. It may also be used as a resource for transit staff to improve and enhance job skills. Alternately, you may invite a peer to visit your system to troubleshoot or offer advice.

Transit staff interested in using the peer-to-peer networking system will be responsible to plan and set up the logistics of the visit. Allowable expenses for peer-to-peer reimbursement must be pre-approved by OPT. There will be no reimbursement for staff time. Along with the Application for Transit Training Fellowship, you must send a brief description of whom and where you plan to visit and what you intend to learn.

IPTA/Iowa DOT Transit Rodeo

The Iowa DOT and IPTA sponsor an annual Transit Rodeo to promote and provide recognition for safe driving skills by Iowa's public transit vehicle operators. Transit operators from around the state meet at the current year's host site to display their safe driving skills. Each operator performs a series of maneuvers that represent many of the actual situations they face as they carry out their daily duties. Funding for the rodeo is provided through RTAP.

IPTA members, OPT staff, local organizations and volunteer groups provide judging for the competition. Competition is broken out into two categories: large bus and van/small bus. Winners are offered an opportunity to represent the state of Iowa and their transit system on a 100% fellowship at the national or international competition. Winners of the large bus category may compete at the next American Public Transit Association (APTA) Rodeo conducted in conjunction with its annual meeting. APTA requires competitors in their national Rodeo to represent transit systems that are members of their organization. For transit systems that are not APTA members, winners of the large bus category may compete in the CTAA sponsored Rodeo. The winner of the van and small bus category competes at the next International Paratransit Rodeo competition sponsored by the CTAA and conducted in conjunction with its annual meeting.

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance is provided through new manager orientation, compliance reviews and on-site monitoring of all small urban and regional transit systems. Recommendations for areas of improvement with emphasis on additional training are offered as a follow-up to ensure compliance with state and federal regulations. OPT staff are available for day-to-day assistance, sensitivity analysis, and regulatory investigations. Technical assistance on procurement contracts and specifications are also available from OPT.

Multi-state Technical Assistance Program (MTAP)

The Iowa DOT is a member in MTAP. MTAP is a network of states that provides a forum for state level discussion of public transportation issues and sharing of technical expertise on transit topics.

Marketing/Advocacy

OPT provides marketing assistance to help transit systems increase public awareness of their transit service. Brochures listing the names and locations of Iowa's transit systems, rideshare programs, and intercity bus carriers have been distributed and are available upon request. Materials may be requested by Iowa transit systems by contacting OPT's secretary.

OPT developed a website that provides a source for information to transit systems and the public. The website includes information and resources on the criteria and application process for all of the programs administered by OPT, information on each of the transit systems, the Statewide Transportation Coordination Council, links to FTA rules and regulations, and much more. Visit our website at: www.iatransit.com.